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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

While U.S. engagement of moderate Islamists remains a hotly debated question, U.S. democracy promoters have been working with legal Islamist parties and their leaders over the past decade. This Special Report examines the experiences of U.S. democracy promoters at the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) working with Islamist parties in three countries: Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen. The assessment is written from the perspective of democracy promoters; it is based on extensive interviews and discussions with staff members who reside in-country, Washington-based staff, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) democratization experts. The promoters' views are necessarily subjective, providing one viewpoint to understand this complex topic.

This report was written by Mona Yacoubian, a special adviser to the United States Institute of Peace's Muslim World Initiative and author of two previous Special Reports examining reform efforts in the Arab world: *Promoting Middle East Democracy: European Initiatives* ([www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr127.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr127.html)) and *Promoting Middle East Democracy II: Arab Initiatives* ([www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr136.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr136.html)). The assessment was conducted in conjunction with a larger USAID-sponsored study titled "Political Opposition in the Arab World: Assessing Opportunities and Obstacles to Promoting Democracy." The overall project is directed by Daniel Brumberg of the United States Institute of Peace.

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

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*Mona Yacoubian*

## Engaging Islamists and Promoting Democracy

### A Preliminary Assessment

## Summary

- Parliamentary elections across the Middle East have led to a wave of Islamist victories. Islamist parties typically boast leaders who are young and dynamic, with strong ties to the community; their party organizations brim with energy and ideas, attracting those who seek change.
- The U.S. government has quietly engaged moderate Islamist parties for several years. U.S. engagement has been most successful where democratic reform is already underway and where the government is genuinely committed to political opening. Other factors include the Islamist parties' political sophistication, popular credibility, and openness to working with U.S. organizations.
- A successful Islamist engagement strategy both empowers individuals and strengthens institutions to yield greater transparency, more accountability, and shifts toward greater moderation.
- Of the three cases addressed in this paper—Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen—Morocco appears to hold the greatest promise for U.S. engagement with moderate Islamists. Meanwhile, Jordan and Yemen offer important though limited instances of success.
- U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East affects the ability of U.S. organizations to promote democracy there. At times, Islamist parties have cut off contact with U.S. democracy promoters to protest specific aspects of U.S. foreign policy, such as the war in Iraq.
- Ultimately, U.S. engagement of moderate Islamists must be understood within the broader political context of the ideological battle in the Muslim world over the place of Islam in public life. Moderate Islamist parties that reject violence and practice democratic ideals are an important counterweight to Islamist extremism, and their work should be encouraged.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>AUG 2007</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2007 to 00-00-2007</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Special Report: Engaging Islamists and Promoting Democracy</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>United States Institute of Peace, 1200 17th Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>16</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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## Introduction

Deeming democratic change to be a long-term antidote to Islamist extremism, the Bush administration coupled its military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq with intensified efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world, underscoring the need for free and fair elections. To date, parliamentary elections of varying openness have taken place across the region, from Morocco to Kuwait. The elections ushered in a wave of Islamist victories, dubbed by many as an “Islamist tsunami.”<sup>1</sup>

The Islamists’ successes stem from their effectiveness as vehicles for popular opposition. While liberal, secular opposition parties remain largely detached from much of the population, Islamists have developed vast and easily mobilized grassroots networks through charitable organizations and mosques. The leadership is often younger and more dynamic, with strong ties to the community, and the party organizations brim with energy and ideas, attracting those who are seeking change.

The U.S. government has quietly engaged a number of moderate and legal Islamist parties across the region for several years, sometimes through normal diplomatic activity, sometimes through government-funded grants to U.S. organizations. This Special Report examines U.S.-funded engagement with legal, nonviolent Islamist parties through the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI), which have the most extensive experience engaging with Islamists in the region, and focuses on Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen, because of their relative political openness and the strength and vibrancy of their Islamist political opposition.

**Successful Strategy.** A successful Islamist engagement strategy both empowers individuals and strengthens institutions to yield greater transparency, more accountability, and shifts toward moderation. Training and empowering individuals cultivates moderates within the parties and enhances their political sophistication and influence. Meanwhile, as regimes in the Arab world resist or manipulate political reforms, strengthening democracy’s infrastructure is as important as supporting individuals. **Independent electoral procedures and monitoring** help to establish free and fair elections. **Institution building** ensures appropriate checks on executive power and a strong rule of law. Strengthening parliaments is especially crucial, as Islamists participate primarily in legislatures.

In assessing whether Islamist parties have moderated in response to U.S. engagement, it is difficult if not impossible to quantify or measure shifts that may themselves be relative and subjective. Directly linking greater moderation to specific U.S. engagement activities is also highly problematic. At best, this engagement should be considered a contributing factor. Nevertheless, the tentative results in Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen are promising enough that continued engagement with moderate Islamists should be encouraged, albeit with greater emphasis on institution building and an eye on the broader context of the ideological battle in the Muslim world between extremism and moderation.

## The Case Studies: Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen

### MOROCCO

**Path to Reform.** Of the three countries examined in this assessment, Morocco’s political opening has been the most significant. The NDI termed it “one of the most compelling examples of democratic reform in the Middle East and North Africa.”<sup>2</sup> As the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) has benefited from Morocco’s democratic reforms, the kingdom offers perhaps the most dynamic case of Islamist integration into the political arena and could be a model for other Arab countries. However, the kingdom’s openness

remains limited. The king retains ultimate power with no real constraints; he can block or withdraw reforms at will, dissolve the parliament, and declare a state of emergency. A vast system of patronage backing the king functions as an informal bureaucracy.

**A Potent Islamist Force.** The PJD is Morocco's most powerful opposition force, holding the third-largest bloc in the country's parliament (42 out of 325 seats).<sup>3</sup> An IRI poll conducted in late 2005 showed the PJD polling 47 percent of the vote for the September 2007 parliamentary elections, far more votes than other parties. A 2006 poll supported this result, suggesting that the PJD continues to be the front runner.

The PJD was formally established in 1998, when the monarchy authorized political participation by Islamist groups. The party's roots lie in the Unification and Reform Movement (MUR), a grassroots Islamist organization that had cultivated a significant popular following. The MUR merged with the Popular Constitutional Democratic Movement (MCPD), an inconsequential political party with Islamist leanings, and ran in the November 1997 parliamentary elections, winning nine seats. The party had loose connections to the palace. The PJD emerged from the MUR as a formal political party in 1998 but maintains strong ties to the movement, which supplies a vast grassroots network of support.

The PJD is noted for its strong, clear vision: It stresses Islamic values as a key point of reference for principles of governance. At the same time, the PJD endorses the king's title as commander of the faithful and insists on maintaining the monarchy's supremacy. It does not call for systemic change but rather seeks to be an opposition party within the status quo. The party is known for internal transparency and effective grassroots outreach. The NDI has described it as having "a strong service ethic that provides needed resources to the community, a decentralized party structure that allows for greater flexibility and more opportunities for multiple leaders, a young leadership, and perhaps most importantly, internal democracy."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the party starkly contrasts with its secular counterparts, which are largely governed by aging leadership with autocratic ruling structures and limited popular support.

Plying its image as clean and accountable, the PJD campaigns on criticizing government corruption and cronyism, pledging governance that responds to the people. The party touts its superior attendance record in parliament, which distinguishes it from other parties that appear detached and unaccountable. The PJD parliamentary delegation usually submits the largest number of questions to the government and denounces government delays in answering them.

The PJD's well-developed grassroots network is largely young and urban, with strong pockets of support in city slums and among university graduates, whose unemployment rate is estimated at 40 percent.<sup>5</sup> IRI polling suggests that jobs and unemployment are by far the largest voter concerns. The PJD has worked hard to attract this disgruntled segment of the population by campaigning on socioeconomic issues, and consequently, it has also drawn in technocrats with no background in Islamic activism who are eager to work on such problems. The PJD is the only Moroccan party that has constituent offices in Europe and actively courts Moroccan communities there.

However, the PJD is by no means monolithic, but encompasses a spectrum of views. Moderates typically push for democratic reforms, a broader role for women, and greater engagement with the West. Some maintain close ties to the palace. Party hard-liners call for a stricter interpretation of Islamic law (*sharia*) and generally hold more socially conservative views. They are far less comfortable with any sort of co-optation by the palace, more suspicious of democracy advocates, and oppose wider engagement with the West, and the United States in particular.

**NDI and IRI Programming.** The NDI launched its first survey mission to Morocco in 1993, establishing a field office in 2001. NDI programming expanded markedly as political reforms accelerated. The NDI currently runs programs in political-party building, parliamentary strengthening, women's participation, and media training. It also operates a focus group center<sup>6</sup> and has trained election monitors. The organization's work in Morocco has been directed largely at the national level.

*The Islamists' successes stem from their effectiveness as vehicles for popular opposition.*

*Continued engagement with moderate Islamists should be encouraged, albeit with greater emphasis on institution building and an eye on the broader context of the ideological battle in the Muslim world between extremism and moderation.*

*Morocco offers perhaps the most dynamic case of Islamist integration into the political arena and could be a model for other Arab countries.*

The IRI has conducted programming in Morocco since 1997, but did not establish a field office until 2004. IRI programming focuses largely on public-opinion polling and political-party training. The institute has worked with municipal councils on local governance issues, though these projects are being phased out. The IRI is also working to increase the presence of women within political-party structures.

**NDI Engagement with Islamists.** The NDI works only with the PJD and its related non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The decision to work with the PJD is grounded in a broader strategy to seek out activist parties with deep grassroots support. As one staffer explained, “We were going to be the right kind of democrats. We weren’t going to operate in an exclusive manner, as others had, because they were Islamists.”<sup>7</sup>

The NDI typically deals with those in the PJD who are reform-minded and moderate, rather than hard-line conservatives. For their part, moderate reformers within the party actively seek out NDI assistance and expertise; hard-line elements remain adamantly opposed to any engagement with U.S. democracy promoters.

NDI program implementers described PJD participation in institute activities as enthusiastic and engaged, characterizing the party as “well ahead” of other political parties and a “model” participant in trainings and workshops. Other implementers underscore the party’s discipline, noting that it attracts people who are committed to their work and who maintain a strong degree of party loyalty.

**IRI Engagement with Islamists.** The IRI has had more limited contact with the PJD; the PJD has cited its opposition to regional U.S. policy to explain its relative lack of interest in working with the IRI, which it associates more closely with the Bush administration. The institute first contacted the PJD only in 2004. Despite these difficulties, the IRI’s chief representative meets regularly with the PJD secretary general.

The PJD has not participated in IRI political-party trainings, but it has been very interested in IRI polling activities, and the party was among the Moroccan political parties to be briefed privately on IRI polling. The institute has sought to engage parties at earlier stages of its public-opinion polling programs by showing the parties how polls are constructed and soliciting their advice when designing survey instruments.

**Results of Engagement.** It is difficult if not impossible to draw direct linkages between U.S.-funded engagement with the PJD, either in the party’s evolution toward greater moderation or in supporting moderates within the party. Other areas, such as the degree to which U.S. efforts have facilitated greater cooperation between Islamist and secular groups, may be slightly easier to measure. Indicators of the PJD’s evolution toward moderation include party statements and interviews with senior leaders, the degree of internal transparency, the PJD’s actions in the parliament, and its willingness to work with secular parties.

**Tracking the PJD’s Evolution.** As mentioned above, the PJD has always held a relatively moderate position in Moroccan politics, acknowledging the ultimate authority of the monarchy and calling for nonviolent, democratic change. It has had long-standing ties to the palace, but with a boost in confidence just after the 2002 parliamentary elections, the party began to strike a more strident tone. Hard-liners who favored a more conservative social agenda and minimal contact with outsiders had significant influence.

The May 16, 2003, suicide attacks in Casablanca were a turning point in the PJD’s political evolution. The PJD was not implicated in the attack, but popular sentiment shifted against the Islamist party, and the PJD defended itself from calls for its dissolution and judgment from political elites that it was morally responsible for the attacks. As one NDI staffer noted, “Prior to May 2003, PJD moderation may have been more questionable. Their platform was more conservative, hewing closely to traditional demands for *sharia*. Things changed after Casablanca.”<sup>8</sup> The party purged hard-liners from leadership posts<sup>9</sup> and reversed its position on two key pieces of legislation: the reform of the Family Code (the *Moudawana*) and new antiterrorism legislation. In 2000, the PJD had staunchly opposed the Family Code reforms, deeming them anti-Islamic. However, the party supported the king’s renewed calls for Family Code reform in October 2003 and voted for the



revised code in January 2004. In a number of press interviews, PJD leader Saad Eddine al Othmani justified his party's support of the Family Code by explaining that the PJD's previous opposition was based on the government's lack of consultation with political parties, the absence of a religious point of reference in the code, and the initial draft's failure to address concerns of the family as a whole. Broadened consultations and new revisions to the draft satisfied party complaints. He noted that the PJD had participated in the debate and discussion leading up to the code's passage and that the law was democratically enacted.<sup>10</sup> The PJD also voted in favor of a controversial antiterrorism law that it had initially opposed; the law was passed after the Casablanca attacks. Human rights groups have criticized the law for its wide-ranging measures, which have been used to arrest and detain scores of terrorist suspects. The shift in position has been described as a politically shrewd, pragmatic decision.

The PJD's moderation continued when it elected Othmani to be its new leader at the party's 2004 congress. Garnering 80 percent of the vote, Othmani embodies the moderate trend within the PJD. He has strongly supported democratic reforms, comparing the PJD to the Christian Democratic parties in Europe. A psychiatrist by training, the charismatic leader stresses that the PJD is not an Islamist party, but a party with an "Islamic reference point." Othmani differentiates between religion and politics, emphasizing that political authority comes from citizens and that those in power should answer to them. He has also argued that *sharia* has evolved over the centuries and encompasses broad themes of equality, justice, and social development. Othmani has promoted engagement with the West, traveling and lecturing throughout Europe and the United States.

Despite the party's apparent ideological shifts, however, its newspaper, *at-Tajdid*, continues to reflect more extreme views. Some have suggested that the dichotomy is intentional: *At-Tajdid* ensures the support of the PJD's base while the party leadership becomes more moderate to assuage the concerns of the palace and elites. The paper regularly runs articles that rail against the United States and Israel, and it has a decidedly hard-line stance on social issues. An editorial in the paper during the 2004 tsunami described the event as divine punishment that could befall Morocco for its moral debauchery. *At-Tajdid* has also strongly criticized music festivals and spearheaded a campaign against the film *Marock*, directed by a Moroccan woman.

**Degree of Internal Democracy and Transparency.** Democracy promoters consistently applaud the PJD for its internal democracy: Considered the most democratically structured of all of Morocco's parties, it is also the most decentralized. Leaders are transparently elected on a regular basis. Regional and district offices are filled through elections and conferences with all members present. Internal debates and votes are held on key policy issues. The party's budget and financing are relatively transparent, with no suggestion of internal corruption. The party also works to ensure an active role for women through an internal quota system. The party's leader claims that the PJD has more women as members than does any other party in Morocco, and the PJD has more women serving in local councils than does any other party.<sup>11</sup>

**The PJD in Parliament.** The PJD has been perhaps the most active party in the parliament, especially since the 2002 elections, when the party tripled its representation. It has focused on battling government corruption and increasing transparency. In addition, the PJD has a strong attendance record, unlike other political parties. The PJD emphasizes the value of the parliament, as it both represents the populace and checks executive power. The party requires its members of parliament (MPs) to attend general assembly and committee sessions, publishing attendance lists and demanding explanations for absences or tardiness. As a result, PJD delegates have the lowest rate of absenteeism of any party.

The PJD holds internal strategy sessions before any hearing questioning a government minister. It requires its deputies to draft at least one oral question per week, one written question per month, and to propose one bill per legislative session. As a result, PJD deputies submitted more written questions to the government than any other party. The party also requires its MPs to remit a minimum of 22 percent of their salaries to the party,

both to bolster party financing and to counter any possible image of individual profiting from public office.<sup>12</sup>

NDI focus groups show that the PJD's appeal stems from its anticorruption stance and its ability to assist with the provision of basic services, such as health care, through well-organized grassroots networks. The two key planks of the party's 2007 campaign platform are battling corruption and achieving 8 percent economic growth. The PJD has also sought to use its parliamentary position to broaden its public appeal by promoting good governance; the PJD's parliamentary delegation is extremely active in demanding government transparency, often questioning government budget allocations and demanding audits.

In the parliament, the PJD deemphasizes its moral agenda, adopting a more pragmatic and sophisticated approach to a number of moral issues. Tourism is a key source of jobs and foreign exchange earnings, but conservative Islamists strongly oppose the gambling and prostitution that often accompany foreign tourism. In response, the PJD has pushed to develop Morocco's infrastructure and establish retirement communities for European retirees. The project both capitalizes on the opportunities inherent in Europe's aging population and preserves the conservative social mores that are important to many Islamists.

**Cooperation with Secular Parties.** NDI multiparty training sessions have facilitated contact and perhaps cooperation between the PJD and secular opposition parties, particularly on reform-related issues. The trainings offer opportunities for networking and future collaboration. In its quarterly reporting, the NDI noted that the PJD continued consultations with other parties after NDI programming. Upon completing a group facilitation training, a PJD member remarked, "By bringing all these political parties together in the same workshops, NDI is in fact gathering the un-gatherable."<sup>13</sup> The NDI has also organized study missions abroad that bring together different political parties, including the PJD.

The PJD may be closer ideologically to some parties than others, but it has cooperated quietly with the secular Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), its ideological rival on certain questions. Some cooperation stems from the typical give-and-take of politics, but the parties also share genuine common ground on electoral and constitutional reforms. Both parties have pushed for constitutional amendments that reduce the power of the monarchy and enhance the independence of the parliament and prime minister. In preparing for the September 2007 parliamentary elections, the PJD has been more open about its contact with the USFP. If the PJD gains a plurality in parliament—a possibility—it could be asked to form a coalition government with the USFP as a potential partner.

**Conclusions.** The PJD has moved clearly toward greater moderation over the past five years. Still, the depth of the moderation and whether it constitutes a normative shift in the party's outlook remain open to question. Certainly, the Casablanca bombings and the resulting fallout caused the party to moderate its ideological stance. However, several indicators suggest that the party's ideological and policy positions might be rooted in more than short-term pragmatism.

The extent to which the NDI and IRI have facilitated the PJD's moderation is also unclear. The institutes have fostered Islamist-secular cooperation and building technical capacity. Both organizations have established strong working relationships with the PJD, meeting with its leadership regularly and including the PJD in numerous workshops, conferences, and trainings. The NDI retained open lines of communication even during periods of official PJD boycott of U.S. organizations, though as of mid-2007, the PJD has refused to work with any U.S.-funded organization, including the NDI, to protest U.S. foreign policy in the region. The Islamist party could exploit widespread anti-U.S. sentiment to strengthen its position in the 2007 elections.

The connection between the PJD's ideological evolution and its engagement with the U.S. political party institutes is even more tenuous. The PJD's moderate trajectory could originate from within the party, or be due to external pressure from the government. Democracy promoters themselves have suggested that the Ministry of Interior contributed to the PJD's moderation, pointing to a government strategy to divide the Islamists by ostracizing extremists and co-opting moderates. One NDI staffer admitted that the

"Moroccan Ministry of Interior had a much more powerful impact on forcing the PJD to evolve than NDI ever could."<sup>14</sup>

Neither the NDI nor the IRI appears to have any illusions about the extent of its ability to transform the Islamist party. However, distinct differences in approach were evident. IRI representatives stated that they were "not targeting the PJD to moderate it." Their approach takes the Islamist party "at face value and at how *they* define themselves."<sup>15</sup> The NDI sees itself as helping to reinforce the PJD's move toward moderation. As such, the institute contributes to legitimizing moderates in the party and building a relationship based on mutual trust. The NDI's strategy is to work with reformists within the movement and strengthen their position in the PJD; NDI staffers have underscored that ostracizing the PJD is unthinkable. As one implementer explained, "Refusing to work with the PJD because they are Islamist would be equivalent to concluding that any Islamist party, however moderate, should not participate in politics. It is equivalent to contending that every Islamist party is by definition too radical to respect democratic values and civil liberties. Rather, it would have the consequence of favoring Islamic radicalism more than marginalizing it."<sup>16</sup>

## JORDAN

**Path to Reform.** Jordan's political opening dates to 1989, when growing popular disaffection prompted the government to launch a substantial political-reform program featuring heightened civil liberties, legalized political parties, and relatively free elections. Throughout the 1990s, however, Jordan's reform process seesawed between limited progress and significant setbacks. When King Abdullah II ascended the throne in 1999, Jordan's reform program stalled due to continued economic troubles and rising political tensions. In 2003, despite continued domestic instability, King Abdullah restored some political freedoms, holding moderately free municipal and parliamentary elections. However, Jordan's limited political opening has yet to be anchored in the rule of law and remains hostage to shifts in the security environment and regional instability emanating from Iraq or the Palestinian territories. Ultimately, political reform depends on the king, who retains nearly total control. He can dissolve the parliament and dismiss the prime minister and cabinet at will.

**Islamist Parties.** Founded in 1992, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political branch of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood, is considered to be the most credible political party in Jordan. The Islamist party is well organized with a high degree of internal transparency, promotes a coherent platform, and, most important, claims broad-based popular support. It benefits substantially from the electoral support of a deeply entrenched grassroots network of mosques, schools, and charitable organizations run by the Brotherhood.

In the June 2003 parliamentary elections, the IAF won 17 out of 110 seats, the largest number of any party (most MPs are independents, not affiliated with any party). The party is a vocal critic of the government, chastising it for widespread corruption and calling for comprehensive reforms, such as democratic elections, an independent parliament, and greater press freedoms. However, the IAF insists on Islam as the only source of legislation. Its leadership is considered to be hard-line and rigid, and the more doctrinaire faction of the party maintains the upper hand, though, like other Islamist parties, the IAF contains a spectrum of political views. Some mid-level party officials are more moderate and can be more forward-thinking and pragmatic.

Although the Islamists have been vocal opponents of government policies, the Muslim Brotherhood's relations with the palace are several decades old. During King Hussein's reign, the government reportedly promoted Islamists as a counterweight to leftist opposition groups, who were deemed a greater threat. The Islamist opposition has not called for systemic change and recognizes the monarchy's legitimacy.

However, buoyed by Hamas's landslide victory in January 2006, the leader of the IAF parliamentary bloc boasted that the Islamists were ready to take power like their "brothers in Palestine."<sup>17</sup> IAF members claim that their party would win 40 to 50 percent of the seats in a free and fair vote. The IAF also has become increasingly outspoken against



government repression and corruption, accusing the government of cracking down harshly on its members following the Hamas victory. The IAF has criticized political-party reforms that would ban parties based on religion and demanded a new electoral law that would remove the government's gerrymandered districts.

More socially conservative than the PJD in Morocco, the IAF explicitly calls for implementing *sharia* in Jordan, supporting segregated classrooms, mandatory head covering, and a ban on nightclubs and alcohol. It has also opposed calls for a 20 percent quota for women in the parliament, saying that it is unconstitutional and underestimates women's abilities. However, with the November 2007 parliamentary elections approaching, the party has moved corruption and good governance issues to the top of its agenda, playing down its conservative social posture. The IAF is also deeply opposed to Jordan's peace treaty with Israel and remains a staunch critic of U.S. policies in the region.

The IAF is not Jordan's only Islamist party: The more moderate al-Wasat party—the name means “center”—was founded in 2001 as a breakaway faction of the IAF. The party has a number of independent Islamists among its estimated 400 members, including some women. Compared with the IAF, however, al-Wasat is a minor party with very limited influence. It currently holds no seats in the parliament, although two to three independent legislators maintain a nominal affiliation. Al-Wasat is preparing intensively for the November 2007 elections, through which it hopes to establish a formal party presence in the lower house.

Al-Wasat occupies a moderate middle ground between more traditional Islamist parties such as the IAF and secular, reform-minded parties. Like the Moroccan PJD, al-Wasat's platform refers to itself as one of an “Islamic reference.” The party nods to its historic roots in Jordan's Islamist movement, but believes that it is a modern version of the earlier movement, arguing that the values of *sharia* are dynamic, not static. Al-Wasat strongly emphasizes the need for democratic reforms and political pluralism, and has called for a balance of power in government and broader civil liberties.

Party leaders stress that their pro-reform positions are not tactical, but reflect the deeper values of the Islamist centrist (*wasatiyyah*) movement. Al-Wasat is very open to engaging with the West and working with U.S. organizations. In public interviews, its party leaders have strongly condemned violent extremism, including attacks in the West, as rooted in an “erroneous understanding of Islam,” calling instead for “disproving their ideas ... through the emergence of an enlightened ideological trend that truly understands Islam.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite observers who suggest that the Jordanian government created al-Wasat as a counterweight to the IAF, one democracy promoter described the party's organization as “impressive” despite its youth; it “appears to be gaining grassroots support.”<sup>19</sup> The party also maintains good ties with the Jordanian government. But it will be a long time before the al-Wasat party can challenge the IAF: it is still quite small and does not represent a significant segment of Jordanian society. One democracy promoter opined that it “will take years for the party to get to the point of being a serious political party.”<sup>20</sup>

**NDI and IRI Programming.** The NDI began working in Jordan in 1993 and opened its Amman field office in 2004. Current programming consists of parliamentary strengthening and political party training. The NDI also has opened a focus group center modeled after Morocco's program. In general, the NDI promotes a more representative multiparty system and strengthening of women's political participation. Through workshops and training, the institute works with both political parties and parliamentary blocs in constituency outreach, platform development, and media relations.

The IRI has been working in Jordan since 2002; it opened its field office in late 2004. The IRI's Jordan strategy is based on its assessment that political party development is premature given the weakness of Jordan's political parties. Instead, current programming focuses on increasing citizen participation and developing leadership skills among community leaders. The institute's strategy has been to build on the potential for political leadership from the grass roots, working on advocacy skills and issue engagement as a step

to running for office. The IRI also conducts regular public-opinion polling. The institute has sponsored three national-level polls and two municipal polls in Jordan.

**Engagement with Islamists.** Both the NDI and IRI have had limited contact with the IAF, which has maintained a tacit boycott of all U.S. organizations to protest U.S. policies in the region. The IAF also forbids its members from traveling to the United States, excluding them from study missions there.

By contrast, al-Wasat has participated actively in both NDI and IRI programming. The NDI's engagement has been continuous, contacting al-Wasat leaders and members on a biweekly basis. Al-Wasat maintained its engagement with the NDI even under increased tension during the Israel-Lebanon war in the summer of 2006. The IRI has also included al-Wasat in some of its trainings, though the party temporarily suspended its participation to protest the Israel-Lebanon war, as it saw the IRI as more closely connected to the Bush administration. Trainings with the IRI resumed in September 2006, when al-Wasat participated in a seminar on platform and membership development.

**NDI and al-Wasat.** NDI engagement with Islamists in Jordan has been conducted largely through its interaction with al-Wasat, focusing on political-party training. Since 2004 the party has participated in numerous trainings, and the NDI works with the party at both the national and regional levels. Trainings have included strategic planning, recruitment, constituent outreach, and message development. In anticipation of the 2007 parliamentary elections, the NDI has intensified its activities with al-Wasat, helping the party to identify areas in which the NDI can be of assistance.

**IRI and al-Wasat.** As mentioned above, the IRI Jordan programming takes a long-term approach to political party development. Most of the IRI programming in Jordan has not directly targeted Islamists or political parties in general. Nonetheless, the institute has undertaken some training with al-Wasat in the belief that the party has the long-term potential to develop into a centrist political party with Islamic leanings.

IRI activities with al-Wasat have focused on platform development. Its training sessions help the party to identify what it stands for and how to project its core values, relying on the IRI's public-opinion polling. The institute helped al-Wasat to analyze the results and shape the party's strategy. Additional activities include broader message development, candidate recruitment—particularly important because 98 percent of candidates in municipalities run as independents—and constituent outreach at the municipal level.

**Limited Engagement with the IAF.** The IAF maintains some distance from both of the U.S. democracy-promotion institutes, often boycotting them implicitly if not explicitly. Nonetheless, the NDI meets periodically with the IAF, although to date, it has had only limited engagement with the party through its programming. With the 2007 parliamentary elections, the NDI is trying to improve its contact with the IAF, particularly with women and moderates in the party.

The IRI has had some communication and dialogue with the IAF, but the party is not a target for IRI assistance. Meetings with the IAF typically do not get beyond statements of protest against U.S. policy in the region.<sup>21</sup> However, two prominent IAF members were present at an IRI-sponsored poll briefing, and the IAF has discussed the poll at length with the IRI's Jordanian partners. IAF MPs have also approached the institute's local polling partner to analyze IRI polling results.

**Results of Engagement.** Given both U.S. institutes' relatively short periods of programming as well as their limited dealings with the IAF, the results of NDI and IRI engagement with moderate Islamists are difficult to track and modest at best. The most comprehensive Islamist engagement consists of NDI activities with al-Wasat. Al-Wasat's potential for moderation and evolution into a key democratic actor is viewed through its level of interaction with democracy promoters, the party's internal transparency, and its potential for working with secular parties, as these elements of engagement can be measured more easily.

**Level of Interaction.** As noted above, both the NDI and the IRI appear to have established good working relations with the party. The IRI has undertaken some trainings with al-Wasat and the NDI meets with the party regularly. It is difficult to measure the effect of these working relationships.

*The results of NDI and IRI engagement with moderate Islamists are difficult to track and modest at best. The most comprehensive Islamist engagement consists of NDI activities with al-Wasat.*

**Degree of Internal Democracy and Transparency.** The NDI has observed marked improvements in al-Wasat's degree of internal democracy and transparency. When the institute began working with al-Wasat, the leadership was not democratically elected, nor was there an ethic of working for the common good; the party operated to serve the individuals who headed it. The party's former leader reportedly used the party as a political tool to promote his own self-interest. The NDI engaged with mid-level activists extensively and with some elements of the leadership, and the party participated in numerous party-strengthening activities, covering party structure and transparency, message development, and outreach. Last year, the party elected as its leader Muhammad al-Qudah, one of the NDI's most active participants in many of their trainings. However, other analysts argue that al-Wasat continues to suffer from a high degree of corruption and still lacks transparency. Some have noted that the party continues to fall prey to personality-driven conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

The NDI also worked closely with a number of women in al-Wasat. Nawal Faouri, one of their most frequent trainees, was elected in May 2006 to the party's political bureau, a senior leadership position. A party moderate, she has made a strong connection between her training and her enhanced political skills and electoral victory. Faouri has also taken moderate public positions, calling on Muslim clerics to allow women to participate in public decision making. She presented a paper on the issue to the International Islamic Conference held in Amman in July 2006.<sup>23</sup>

**Bridging with Secular Parties.** Al-Wasat is both capable of and interested in cooperating with secular parties, particularly on reform issues. Party members were cordial and cooperative with other parties during NDI-sponsored multiparty training sessions. Al-Wasat is a member of the National Movement, a coalition of nine centrist opposition parties, both Islamist and secularist. The coalition has exerted only minimal influence to date, but it could effectively lobby for reform in the future.

**Conclusions.** U.S. engagement with Islamists in Jordan has not been as lengthy or rich as in the Moroccan case. First, Jordan's democratic reforms have been more fragile, with periods of opening followed by significant and sometimes abrupt reversals. The November 2005 hotel bombings, called Jordan's September 11, further dampened efforts at political liberalization, as security matters trumped political openness.

Second, Islamist politics in Jordan is influenced more deeply by international events, particularly the war in Iraq and the Hamas victory in the Palestinian territories. Protesting U.S. policies in these countries, the IAF has eschewed significant contact with U.S. democracy promoters, one of whom emphasized that "claiming engagement would be difficult given the IAF's protests over U.S. policies."<sup>24</sup>

Third, Jordan's political system is difficult to liberalize. The parliament remains extremely weak and political parties—except the IAF—are poorly developed, with little ability to represent popular aspirations and little integration into Jordan's political culture. Dominated by their leaders' personalities, the parties are typically devoid of any unifying ideology or specific policy-oriented platforms. As one democracy promoter described them, "At best, they are intellectual clubs with an Amman address. Essentially there is the government and the Islamists, and a desert in between."<sup>25</sup> Promoters thus must help to create key democratic building blocks from scratch to develop political alternatives to the IAF.

Political apathy in Jordan is also quite high. As one analyst explained, "The regime's Achilles heel is the feeble bond of trust between most of the citizens and state."<sup>26</sup> In a September 2005 IRI public-opinion poll, more than 90 percent of those surveyed did not believe that current political parties represented their aspirations.<sup>27</sup> Instead, politics is driven largely by tribal affiliations.

Nonetheless, the NDI has developed a meaningful working relationship with al-Wasat, and as indicators above suggest, albeit vaguely, al-Wasat appears to have benefited from the interaction. It appears to have greater potential to develop a grassroots network as well as an enhanced capacity to cooperate with secular parties.

The 2007 parliamentary elections will test al-Wasat's political development. Democracy promoters are hoping that the party will win parliamentary seats, a clear indicator of success. Perhaps more important, however, al-Wasat may be able to counter the jihadist Islam that continues to threaten Jordan's political development by offering a moderate counter-ideology to violent extremism. The party is already a foil to the IAF's staunch social conservatism and opposition to the government. Still, more time and assistance will be needed for the party to grow and mature.

## **YEMEN**

**Path to Reform.** Yemen's path to reform has been dogged by widespread poverty, high illiteracy rates, and endemic corruption. Significant democratic reforms were implemented in the 1990 unification of North and South Yemen, including the legalization of opposition parties, creation of an independent electoral system, and expanded press freedoms. Parliamentary elections were held in 1993. However, Yemen's democratic opening was marred by numerous setbacks, capped in 2001 by a presidential consolidation of power that amended the constitution to extend both parliamentary and presidential terms. The president also gained new powers to dissolve the parliament and extended his control over the legislature by enlarging the president-appointed upper house.

In September 2006, in an election questioned by observers, Ali Abdullah Saleh remained as president, lengthening his rule to nearly three decades. Yemen's short-term prospects for democratic reform remain dim, but democracy advocates still view the presidential race—which featured a genuine opposition candidate backed by a secular-Islamist pro-reform coalition—as a potential step toward greater political opening. Observers are now focusing on whether the opposition, particularly the powerful Islah party, with its strong grassroots base, can be a political counterweight to the regime and agitator for democratic reform.

**Islah: Yemen's Principal Islamist Party.** The Yemeni Assembly for Reform, known popularly as Islah, was founded in 1990. Its roots and spiritual core lie in Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in the early 1960s. Led by one of Yemen's most influential tribal leaders, Sheikh Abdullah Hussein al-Ahmar, the Islah party is more of a loose coalition of tribal and religious elements than a political party. Its membership includes people associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, pious conservatives attached to Yemen's religious institutes, and key segments of the tribal population. Islah's base, considered the fastest growing in Yemen, is young and angry with the status quo. As 40 percent of Yemenis live below the poverty line, the party mobilizes its popular support by opposing widespread government corruption and the lack of basic public services.

Islah initially was allied with the government and still has tribal ties to the president. However, beginning in the late 1990s, it spearheaded opposition to the government's encroachment on Yemen's nascent democratic reforms. During the 2003 parliamentary elections—marred by widespread irregularities—the ruling General Popular Congress (GPC) gained 225 of 301 seats while Islah won only 46 seats. Nonetheless, the Islamist party had the greatest number of seats among opposition parties. The Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the other principal opposition group, won only 7 seats.

Islah's platform is socially conservative, seeking "social reform in all fields of life on the basis of Islam,"<sup>28</sup> and the party emphasizes that its commitment to reform and democratic governance is bound by Islamic laws. However, Islah's approach to reform is modern, calling for enhanced political pluralism, an independent judiciary, and the peaceful transfer of power.

Today, Islah is the only opposition party with broad grassroots appeal. It has an extremely sophisticated organizational structure, with a strong presence at the national, provincial, and local levels. To advocate for democratic reforms, it has joined forces with secular parties, principally the YSP; in November 2005, Islah presented a comprehensive reform platform as part of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), a coalition of six opposition

parties. The program calls for a parliamentary system with diminished executive powers, an independent judiciary, improved electoral laws, and the depoliticization of the military. It is an important milestone for cross-party cooperation, though skeptics point to differences among the parties as an inherent weakness in Yemen's reform movement.<sup>29</sup>

Islah's members break down generally into reformers and hard-liners. The reform faction occupies the party's middle and upper echelons of leadership and exerts the most influence on Islah's policy positions. Reformers in the party typically hail from Yemen's intelligentsia; they are editors, journalists, or technocrats in government and business.

Among hard-liners, some consider Sheikh Abd al-Majid al-Zindani to be Islah's spiritual guide. He is the president of al-Iman University and, until February 2007, headed Islah's Shura Council. Zindani's more doctrinaire approach appeals to Islah's conservative base, though he is reportedly marginal to the inner workings of the party. Zindani is deeply opposed to engagement with the West and often criticizes moderates within the party for their ties to Western organizations. He represents Islah's hard-line membership, many of them veterans of the Afghan war of the 1980s; some analysts argue that without Islah, the veterans might have continued on a path of violent extremism.<sup>30</sup> Concerned by Zindani's radicalism and possible links to al-Qaeda, the U.S. government labeled Zindani a "specially designated global terrorist" in February 2004 and has pressured the Yemeni government to extradite him to the United States.<sup>31</sup> Islah party members voted Zindani off the Shura Council in February 2007, but also urged the Yemeni government to pressure Washington to remove him from its list of global terrorists.

Yemen has a long tradition of Islamist extremism, but an International Crisis Group report asserts that Islah itself "plays a mediating role between the state and the country's more conservative elements." The report also describes Sheikh Abdullah as "far more a traditional tribal leader and republican hero than Islamist ideologue" and asserts that there are two principal streams of Yemeni Islamism: "members of Islah who opt to participate in the system and the radical groups that oppose the Yemeni state as well as the West."<sup>32</sup>

**NDI Programming.** The IRI does not conduct programming in Yemen. The NDI began working in Yemen in 1993 and opened its field office in 1997. NDI programming centers on political-party development, parliamentary strengthening, and women's participation. The institute also provides election-monitoring training and support and operates a tribal conflict-resolution program. The NDI's political-party training focuses on message development, recruitment, and constituent outreach. Its parliamentary-strengthening component seeks to identify reform-minded members of the parliament and strengthen their core skills. The women's programming aims to increase national and political-party support for woman candidates and provide them with campaigning skills.

**Engagement with Islah.** The NDI has engaged with Islah through all three of its programming components and in elections preparations and monitoring. The institute works exclusively with moderates in the party, as Islah hard-liners remain adamantly opposed to the party's ties to Western organizations. The NDI's chief representative in Sanaa meets regularly with Islah's secretary general, deputy, and other leaders. NDI staff also meets regularly with mid-level party officials. NDI staff in Yemen underscored "the endless phone calls and meetings that overall make a real difference. Trainings simply open the door for contact. A tremendous amount of follow-up, advice, and strategizing goes on beyond the formal training programs. It is here that we may in fact have the greatest impact."<sup>33</sup> NDI representatives noted that, compared with other political parties participating in their trainings, Islah was better organized and able to affect the reform movement.

**Cross-Party Cooperation.** A crucial part of the NDI's work centers on building relations between opposition party leaders and fostering secular-Islamist cooperation on reform. The NDI uses interparty dialogue to advance the reform agenda, actively supporting the aforementioned JMP, a group of six opposition parties including Islah that has pushed for greater democratic reform and political opening. Established in 2002, the JMP is essentially a collaborative effort between Islah and the YSP, an ardently secular party. The parties have worked together on a number of process-related issues, such as electoral law reform.



The NDI helped to bring the parties together and has hosted numerous JMP meetings and sponsored Islah and YSP delegates on a number of trips abroad. The NDI asserts that the parties can more easily forge important bonds by meeting outside of Yemen.

**Results of Engagement.** Islah has worked closely with the NDI for several years, and certain efforts, such as encouraging women's political participation and cross-party cooperation, have yielded tangible results. However, NDI parliamentary work with Islah does not appear to have had a significant effect. The NDI's limited success with regard to parliamentary programs could reflect the parliament's relative weakness. Similarly, it is difficult to measure the local effect of engaging Islah, as municipal councils are weak. The local councils were only established in 2001. They have little revenue and councilors have minimal training. Gauging Islah's response to NDI efforts, therefore, may best be accomplished through examining its capacity for Islamist-secular cooperation, the level of interaction with NDI, and potential for greater moderation.

**Islamist-Secular Cooperation.** The JMP is perhaps the most resounding success of the NDI's work in Yemen. The Islamist-secular reform coalition began as a weak and ineffectual alliance, wracked by division. It has become a serious advocate for reform that might be an effective counterweight to the government. The JMP's two primary members, Islah and the YSP, realized that cooperation was essential to opposing the government's power. As Abdul Wahab al-Anisi, deputy secretary general of Islah explained, "We subordinated our ideological agendas to the one thing we all had in common, which was a realization that political reform was a necessity if we were to save democracy in Yemen and stop the country's descent into endemic corruption."<sup>34</sup>

The JMP members' reform platform serves as a model for bridging the gap between secularists and Islamists throughout the Arab world. The JMP also pressured the government to amend electoral procedures before the September 2006 elections and agreed on a joint presidential candidate whose campaign offered Yemenis a genuine reform alternative to President Saleh and the country's first true multicandidate presidential election.

The NDI did not create the JMP, but members of both Islah and the YSP have commended the NDI for its advice and training, noting the institute's important contributions to their joint efforts. In particular, the NDI has focused on promoting the coalition's reform platform. In early 2006, soon after the platform's publication, the NDI met with several JMP representatives to translate elements of the program into a concrete election platform. In addition, the institute provided training on message development and communication methods that JMP members could use in local election campaigns.

**Level of Interaction.** The NDI appears to have established excellent working relations with Islah. NDI staff meet regularly with Islah members at all levels, which seems to have fostered a well-established sense of trust between moderate Islah reformers and the institute. Again, directly linking a strong working relationship to the ideological and programmatic emphases of Islah's leaders is difficult, but the progress toward democratic reforms—however tentative at times—likely owes something to the depth and professionalism of Islah's relationship with the NDI and the party's openness to trainings and other activities. The effect of face-to-face meetings and regular personal contact should not be underestimated even though it is difficult to quantify.

**Potential for Evolution.** Here the record is mixed. Certainly, several of Islah's policy positions can be taken as evidence of moderation. The party voted to oust Sheikh Zindani from its Shura Council, and Islah's help in drafting the JMP reform platform, which calls for substantive democratic reforms, suggests that the party's moderate wing may have gained the upper hand. The reform platform's demands include the peaceful rotation of power, popular empowerment, and an end to corruption. NDI representatives believe that Islah's reform positions are not merely tactical directives to bring the party to power, but a potential shift in the party's ideological perspective.

At the same time, radical hard-liners in the party, led by Zindani, continue to rail against the party's reformers and refuse to engage with Western organizations. NDI implementers acknowledge that Islah is clearly still an ideological religious party and caution that observers should not romanticize it. Concerns about Islah's ultimate intentions may

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be legitimate, and it remains to be seen whether the party's moderate or hard-line faction will ultimately prevail. But in the short term, Islah may offer the only real alternative to an increasingly authoritarian government.

**Conclusions.** NDI engagement with Islah has been most notable in promoting Islamist-secular cooperation on reform. The Yemen case study is an unparalleled success in this area. None of the other cases feature similar levels of cooperation between Islamists and secular parties. Given Yemen's precarious path toward reform, the JMP is critical to ensuring that sustained democratic opening remains on the agenda, and despite the government's attempts to sow dissent within the coalition, the opposition force already has begun to demonstrate its ability to oppose the government more coherently and forward its reform agenda. The Islamist-secular coalition appears to embody precisely the type of cooperation on reform that many observers deem necessary throughout the Arab world.

The NDI's continued engagement with Islah could also strengthen moderates within the Islamist party. As described by one U.S. democracy advocate, "The worst thing we can do is isolate the ideological roots of these movements so that they end up merely supporting and promoting the same ideals with no outside influence, no influx of fresh ideas. It is essential to introduce a new way of thinking."<sup>35</sup> Islah's moderation is by no means ensured, but the party appears to offer a nonviolent, potentially democratic alternative to the radical Islamic extremism that is deeply embedded in Yemen's history and traditions. One democracy promoter noted that September 11 was a defining moment for Islah, as the party distanced itself from the terrorist attacks, calling them extreme and not representative of Islah's vision of Islam. Nonetheless, Yemen's tribalism and radicalism are serious challenges for moderates within Islah. Certainly, NDI assistance has helped moderates in their task, but the end result is by no means assured.

## Final Conclusions

A number of broad strategic conclusions emerge from this examination of U.S. engagement with moderate Islamists in Morocco, Jordan, and Yemen. Not surprisingly, engagement has been most effective in countries where democratic reform is most deeply rooted and where government leadership has demonstrated genuine commitment to political opening. Opposition parties, both secular and Islamist, benefit from an open political space, especially a relatively independent parliament. Successful engagement also appears to correlate with the degree of the Islamist party's political sophistication and development, popular credibility, and openness to working with a U.S. organization.

In every case, U.S.-funded efforts to engage moderate Islamists resulted in strong working relationships, featuring regular contact between democracy promoters and Islamist-party partners and a strong reservoir of trust. Often, Islamist parties demonstrated great enthusiasm for and interest in democracy-promotion programs, though in nearly every case, anger over U.S. policies in the region—particularly regarding Iraq or the Palestinians—led to boycotts and disrupted engagement. Even during boycotts, however, informal ties and dialogue continued in most cases.

Of the three countries considered, Morocco appears to hold the greatest promise for U.S. engagement with moderate Islamists. A unique blend of factors, from the kingdom's steady reform trajectory to the PJD's sophistication, popular credibility, and openness to working with U.S. organizations, combined to yield an interesting test case of Islamist moderation. Of course, it is difficult to determine the extent to which other factors affected the PJD's moderation, such as the May 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks and pressure from the Ministry of Interior.

Meanwhile, Jordan and Yemen offer important though limited instances of success. In Yemen, the NDI's fostering of the JMP is laudable. Analysts and observers argue that such Islamist-secular alliances can engender moderation and pressure recalcitrant regimes to reform, and the Yemen case offers important insights to be emulated elsewhere.

As for Jordan, despite the disadvantage from the IAF's boycott of U.S. organizations, efforts to engage with al-Wasat are commendable. The party's recent arrival on the political scene and Jordan's tenuous political opening suggest slow progress at best, but U.S. efforts to strengthen the party may pay off in the long term. As the Arab world struggles with the larger battle of ideas being waged between violent extremism and moderation, an ideological compromise may have its roots in such an Islamist centrist movement.

Two final conclusions bear consideration. First, moderate Islamist parties are crucial to the U.S. strategy to promote democracy in the Arab world. The parties have proven their popular strength, ability to win free elections, and capacity to moderate. Such evolution requires close scrutiny, but fears of Islamist parties run amok and a repeat of an Iranian-style revolution elsewhere appear to be exaggerated. Instead, we should ask whether we could have democracy in the Arab world without Islamists. The arguments for engaging with them are powerful, as meaningful political participation appears to exert a moderating influence on Islamist parties. As one democracy advocate explained, "We will get nowhere with the Islamists by screaming at them from the outside. It is essential to work with them, train them, include women party members, strategize and engage in discussion. It is critical to expand their worldview."<sup>36</sup>

Second, U.S. engagement of moderate Islamists must be understood within a broader political context. The Arab world—and the larger Muslim world—is in the throes of an ideological battle to define the role of Islam in public life, and the threat of Islamist extremism has pervaded each of the three countries to varying degrees. Morocco and Jordan each suffered terrorist attacks, in which several innocent Muslim civilians perished. Meanwhile, Yemen—the ancestral homeland of Osama bin Laden—has been a crucible of Islamist militancy, with a number of violent extremist cells operating within the country. Moderate Islamist parties that reject violence and practice democratic ideals are an important counterweight to these forces and could be crucial to developing an indigenous, forward-looking counter-ideology that seeks to bring the Arab world into the twenty-first century, albeit on its own terms.

## Policy Implications

- **Better analytical instruments to measure Islamist parties' transparency and ideological evolution—and the effectiveness of U.S.-funded training—must be developed.** Measuring moderation is inherently difficult, but a more rigorous approach to evaluating Islamist engagement programs is possible. Certainly, more intensive empirical research on the Islamist parties, their internal transparency, party platforms, policy positions, and public statements is in order. As Islamist parties gain offices at the local and national levels, discrete studies of their political behavior and policies while in office could gauge political tendencies and better measure the effectiveness of programming.
- **Political party strengthening should be accompanied by institution building, particularly of national parliaments and municipal councils.** Strengthening the rule of law is essential to any Islamist engagement strategy. Parliaments and municipal councils are the arenas most frequently open to Islamist participation. Emasculated parliaments that are rubber stamps for ruling regimes are far less likely to promote political maturity and moderation among Islamist parties. Fears that Islamists could exploit political openness to gain power and overturn democratic change should be assuaged through establishing the rule of law and a system of checks and balances.
- **Islamist engagement activities should be expanded to professional syndicates and religious charitable organizations.** Islamist engagement strategies should look beyond focusing solely on political parties and seek to provide the same types of training to professional syndicates and NGOs, including Islamist charities. Profes-

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sional syndicates are an important venue for political aspirations, often claiming membership in the tens of thousands. Over time, such associations have taken on increasingly political overtones and could be influential actors in the political arena. Yet many of these organizations suffer from opacity, corruption, and other problems. Broadening engagement of moderate Islamists to include professional syndicates, possibly even Islamist charities, is an untapped opportunity that deserves further exploration.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of this paper, Islamists are defined as those who believe that systems of governance should be rooted in Islamic beliefs and practices. Significant differences exist among Islamists with respect to how and to what degree Islam should influence governance. Some advocate nothing short of the full implementation of *sharia*. Others have more flexible interpretations.
2. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "Morocco: The Edge of Promise," briefing paper, Washington, DC, April 7, 2005, p. 6.
3. The author wishes to acknowledge Andrew Mandelbaum for his research on the background of the PJD.
4. "Morocco: The Edge of Promise," p. 10.
5. The party wields significantly less influence in rural areas, which generally maintain greater allegiance to traditional government-affiliated parties.
6. Established in 2003, the People's Mirror has conducted more than 150 focus groups on topics ranging from public perceptions of the parliament and political parties to women in public life and attitudes on freedom of expression.
7. Telephone interview, June 29, 2006.
8. Telephone interview, June 30, 2006.
9. These included Mustapha Ramid, who was forced to resign as head of the PJD's parliamentary bloc, and Ahmed Reissouni, president of the Unity and Reform Movement, which has close ties to the PJD. Reissouni had challenged the king's title as commander of the faithful, placing the supremacy of his religious authority under question.
10. "Secretary-General of Morocco's Islamist PJD Party Interviewed," *Jeune Afrique*, April 2, 2006; "Interview with Saad Eddine al-Othmani," conducted by Amr Hamzawy, *Arab Reform Bulletin* vol. 3, no. 10 (December 2005), available at [www.carnegieendowment.org](http://www.carnegieendowment.org).
11. Speech by Saad Eddine al-Othmani, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, May 8, 2006.
12. Eva Wegner, "Morocco: PJD Works at Being New and Different," *Arab Reform Bulletin* vol. 4, no. 3 (April 2006).
13. "Morocco Party Strengthening and Parliamentary Reform," CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report, July 1–September 20, 2005, Washington, DC, p. 7.
14. Telephone interview, June 30, 2006.
15. Interview, July 6, 2006.
16. Telephone interview, June 30, 2006.
17. Thanassis Cambanis, "Jordan's Islamists See a Path to Political Power," *The Boston Globe*, March 21, 2006.
18. Quote from Fayiz al-Rabi, member of al-Wasat's political bureau, in *al-Ghad*, October 5, 2005.
19. Telephone interview, June 29, 2006.
20. Telephone interview, September 11, 2006.
21. Telephone interview, September 11, 2006.
22. Janine Clark, "Political Opposition in the Arab World: The Case Study of Jordan," forthcoming from United States Institute of Peace.
23. Mahmoud al Abed, "Muslim Scholars Debate Role of Women in Islam," *Jordan Times*, July 6, 2006.
24. Telephone interview, September 11, 2006.
25. Telephone interview, September 11, 2006.
26. International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Challenge of Political Reform: Jordanian Democratization and Regional Instability," Middle East Briefing no. 10, October 8, 2003, p. 2.
27. Public Opinion Poll Unit, *Democracy in Jordan* (Amman: Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), p. 10.
28. Ahmed A. Hazam al-Yemeni, *The Dynamic of Democratisation—Political Parties in Yemen* (Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003), p. 45.
29. Ana Echague, "Yemen," in *Strategies for Democratic Change: Assessing the Global Response*, ed. Ted Piccone and Richard Youngs, pp. 151–176 (Washington, DC: The Democracy Project, 2006).
30. Echague, "Yemen," p. 9.
31. Gregory Johnsen, "Profile of Sheikh Abd al-Majid Zindani," *Terrorism Monitor* vol. 4, no. 7 (April 6, 2006), available at [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org).
32. Johnsen, "Profile," p. 9.
33. Telephone interview, July 3, 2006.
34. Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Technocrat Recasts Yemen's Presidential Race, Political Future," *Washington Post*, September 20, 2006.
35. Telephone interview, July 3, 2006.
36. Telephone interview, July 3, 2006.



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